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For Immediate Release
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Water's Value Goes Unrecognized by Power Producers

Report Highlights that Green Energy Choices Use Little Water

BOULDER -- In the arid American West, water sustains our families, farms, and industries, along with our rivers and lakes. But energy providers, whose power plants consume vast quantities of scarce western water, aren't adequately taking into account the impacts their large water use has on all other water users when they make planning decisions. A new report by Western Resource Advocates, "[Every Drop Counts: Valuing the Water Used to Generate Electricity](#)," provides a critical analysis of how electric utilities' can – and should – appropriately value water in their long-range planning.

Water consumption has long been a hidden cost of producing electricity. Across the six western states of Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, power plants consume an estimated 395,000 acre-feet (AF) of water annually -- equivalent to the water consumption of the cities of Denver, Phoenix and Albuquerque *combined*.

In light of the mounting challenge of meeting the region's growing water needs, western states can no longer afford to have electric utilities and their regulators ignore the value of the water they use, the report concludes. Thermoelectric power plants, many of which are fueled by coal or nuclear fuels, require large volumes of water to operate, competing directly with municipal, agricultural, and environmental water needs. In contrast, wind turbines, solar PV panels, and many geothermal plants require no water.

"Water and power providers are looking at the same pool of water to meet their future demands. But there isn't enough water to do both," said WRA Energy-Water Analyst Stacy Tellinghuisen, who notes that "On the bright side, the transition to cleaner energy sources can provide new water supplies for growing cities across the region."

In one example, the report cites the water benefits of Colorado's 2010 Clean Air-Clean Jobs Act, under which Xcel Energy will replace several of its oldest plants in the Denver-Metro region with cleaner-burning natural gas, energy efficiency, and other resources.

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“Phasing out the region’s oldest coal plants not only improves air quality, but also frees up scarce water supplies at a critical time,” said John Nielsen, WRA’s Energy Program Director. The water saved by Xcel could be as much as 5,240 AF, enough to meet the needs of more than 52,000 people, and could be worth over \$50 million.

Investing in water-efficient sources of energy like wind and solar PV saves water today and for decades to come, and helps electric utilities hedge against the risk of short- or long-term drought. These decisions are critical, particularly as the Interior West continues to wrestle with an 11-year drought that has left the region’s biggest reservoirs – Lake Mead and Lake Powell – half empty.

The report is available online at
<http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org/everydropcounts>

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